



## ISSUE BRIEF: Israeli Settler Violence Against Palestinians in the West Bank

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### What is the extent of Israeli settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank?

- Settler violence has surged in recent years, particularly since Prime Minister Netanyahu's far-right government took office. On its watch, settlers are [committing](#) three violent attacks against Palestinians per day on average, up from two per day in 2022. In the [first five months of 2023](#), 475 settler-related incidents led to Palestinian casualties or property damage. Prior to this year, attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank rose for [six years in a row through 2022](#).
- The intensity of settler attacks is also increasing. In February 2023, hundreds of settlers [ravaged](#) the West Bank town of Huwara, setting residences on fire, torching cars, and blocking ambulances. A Palestinian aid worker was killed. Even the Israeli military commander for the West Bank called the attack a "pogrom." In June, settlers launched a series of attacks against Palestinian villages in the West Bank – including Turmus Ayya, where the majority of residents are US citizens. A [US permanent resident](#) married to an American citizen was [killed](#) by Israeli police. Israeli security officials [condemned](#) the settler attacks as "nationalist terrorism."
- While some [settlements](#) are historically the most violent, and the Palestinian villages near them are at particularly high risk, settler violence is carried out [throughout the West Bank](#). Settler violence tends to spike each year during the Palestinian [olive harvest](#).

### Why do Israeli settlers commit violence against Palestinians?

- Settler violence is a means to achieve a [political end](#). By terrorizing Palestinians and making their lives untenable, radical settlers push Palestinians to leave their homes so that they can [seize](#) the land. Settler attacks serve as a tool to extend and consolidate Israeli control in the occupied Palestinian territory of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.
- Their attacks are succeeding in forcing Palestinians out. For example, Israelis from outposts of one settlement (Kochav HaShachar, east of Ramallah) have driven multiple Palestinian communities – [al-Baq'ah](#), [Ein Samiya](#), and [Ras a-Tin](#) – to uproot themselves since 2022.
- "[Revenge](#)" for terror attacks by Palestinians is sometimes the pretext of settler violence. Since Israel's 2005 disengagement from Gaza and four settlements in the northern part of the West Bank, settlers have also conducted "[price tag](#)" attacks in retaliation for actions by Israeli authorities that they oppose. While most often victimizing Palestinian civilians, settlers sometimes also target [international activists](#) and even [Israeli security forces](#).

## What are Israel's obligations concerning settler violence? Is it meeting those obligations?

- As the [occupying power](#) in the Palestinian territories it conquered in 1967 (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip), Israel is [required](#) under international law to ensure the well-being of Palestinians living under occupation, who are "[protected persons](#)." [According to the Israeli Law Professors' Forum for Democracy](#), "This obligation means that the army must be organized in advance in such a way as to prevent injuries to Palestinian residents; they must act to stop attacks made on Palestinian residents and their property as they take place; and, if they have already taken place, the army must investigate such injuries in order to identify and locate those responsible for injury and bring them to trial."
- In most cases, the Israeli military has neither prevented settler attacks nor halted the onslaughts in progress, even though in some cases settlers have publicly [announced](#) "revenge" marches in advance. Former top security officials identify [lack of motivation](#) as the main reason for the IDF's failure to prevent settler attacks; notably, the core mission of Israeli soldiers is protecting settlers from Palestinians, not the other way around.
- In numerous cases, soldiers have [stood by, guarding](#) settlers while the settlers attacked Palestinians. In some instances, soldiers [have aided](#) the settler attacks. For example, a Palestinian woman in Huwara whose house had been set ablaze by settlers [recounted](#) that the Israeli military fired tear gas and stun grenades at her while she tried to put out the fire.
- Since 2005, only 3 percent of [investigations](#) into settler violence yielded convictions. Months after the Huwara pogrom, none of the attackers was [charged](#) with a crime.
- Powerful far-right members of the Netanyahu government (themselves settlers and proponents of annexation) have [expressed support](#) for violent settlers and condemned the IDF for calling the settler attacks "terrorism." While he criticized the rampaging settlers, Netanyahu [compared](#) them to Israeli pro-democracy protesters.

## What should the Biden administration do concerning surging settler violence?

- Reinforce American opposition to settlements and the harm they do in general by revoking the "Pompeo Doctrine" – and thus publicly restoring the long standing, bipartisan US position that settlements are inconsistent with international law;
- Deny US entry visas to those who have engaged in, or incited settler violence against, Palestinian civilians;
- Investigate whether any US-origin military equipment has been used in connection with acts of settler violence (as well as other acts toward annexation) and, if so, determine whether such use constitutes a violation of US arms export control and/or foreign aid law;
- Make clear that the United States will not block accurate, appropriate actions in international fora, including at the United Nations Security Council and International Criminal Court, regarding settler violence (as well as other acts toward annexation).